

# PHOBOS



**NYHETSBLAD FOR ARES - kun for medlemmer**

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## REDAKSJONELT

La først og fremst si oss glade for at dette nummeret utgjør realiseringen av en gammel tanke: PHOBOS som felles medlemsblad for begge Ares-foreningene, både på Blindern og Bjølsen. Vi håper at våre lesere i spillklubben på Blindern skal bli både mange og interesserte. Som vi ofte pleier å betone sterkt, ikke minst i PHOBOS' lederspalte, så er vi avhengige av andres innsats for å kunne skape et blad på mer enn et par-tre sider hver gang. Dermed er vi sterkt interesserte i å motta stoff fra f.eks. folk som vil skrive referat fra sine spillsesjoner, som har noen nyheter å komme med, som vil omtale nye spill, bøker etc. Selvsagt garanterer vi ikke hva som helst spalteplass, men det skal være temmelig sært, langt eller dårlig før vi sier nei til innsendt stoff.

Ellers vil vi i gammel PHOBOS-ånd få lov til å klage på at det er så lite å skrive redaksjonelt om. Dog kan vi få lov til å henvise til forrige nummer, og en gammel tradisjon i bladet vårt: En gang i blant gjør en eller annen den helt store tabben m.h.t. nummereringen. Ofte er det "løpenummeret" som blir feil, men et par ganger har det klikket på området år & dato istedet. Men selvsagt gjør vi så godt vi kan for å rette det opp igjen. Dermed må vi altså få konstatere at de av dere som mottok PHOBOS 185 med datoen "onsdag 26. juli 1995" på, nå er innehavere av et ytterst sjeldent samler eksemplar...

Ellers skal vi ikke bruke så mye tid på tradisjonell skriving om vær & vind eller andre dagligdagse forhold denne gangen, siden vi regner med å komme tilbake til slike temaer nok ganger i fremtidige nummer av bladet... Men altså: Velkommen til alle våre nye lesere!

## **PHOBOS**

### **Redaksjon:**

**Johannes H. Berg, Herman Ellingsen, Trond Jansen**

**Utkommer til hver 2. og hver 4. onsdag i måneden (unntatt desember, da vi hopper over romjulen...)**

# EX CATHEDRA

(eller, for nye lesere: spalten til Ares Bjølsens ærede formann)

Foreningene våre, på Blindern og Bjølsen skal jo nå samarbeide om PHOBOS som felles medlemsblad, og det betyr at vi kommer til å sette av riktig mye plass for evt. innlegg fra Blindern-Ares. Sikkert etterhvert også noen ord fra formann/leder etc., eller andre faste ting som kan tilsvare denne spalten. Men, i det minste inntil videre, lar vi EX CATHEDRA gå mer eller mindre som før...

Det kan jo se ut til at vi er på rett vei. Ares' andre møte i 1997 (sist onsdag) ga i det minste tilnærmet økonomisk balanse på driften: 150 kr i inngangspenger er bare en tier short av det vi trenger for å dekke husleien, og når vi i tillegg kan spe på med en del medlemsavgifter, er det klart at foreningens økonomi har sett verre ut enn akkurat nå. Men ett enkelt vellykket møte er selvsagt ikke nok til å rette opp vanskeligheter som tross alt har vart en god stund. Av & til går det oppover her i verden, og av og til nedover; for alt vi vet kan møtet 15/1 bare ha vært et tilfeldig blaff.

Ellers er det ikke lenger så akutt med den berømmelige lokale-saken for Felleshuset, som antydte i forrige nummer. Vi regner vel nå med at vi skal kunne bli her på Bjølsen inntil videre, og til og med la være å plage leserne våre med denne gjengangeren i PHOBOS' spalter en stund fremover. Skjønt det kan selvsagt skje ting her også, på kort varsel. Men da er det jo heldig at vi har et nyhetsblad som kommer ut to ganger i måneden. Nå er vel dette med lokale-problemer ikke helt ukjent for mine lesere på Blindern heller?

Det ser i hvert fall foreløpig ut til at vi på Bjølsen skal kunne dele lokalene med andre leietagere, noe som gjør deres økonomiske situasjon litt sikrere. På den annen side har andre leietagere tidligere også betydd alle slags problemer, alt fra "akutte klager på vaskingen" til all slags rot, brekkasje & svinn av spill, så vi får nå se også den saken litt nærmere an. Mer generelt er det vel all mulig grunn til å se på våre egne rutiner: Både vaskelister og protokollføring har ligget nede i annet halvår 1996, og er noe som bl.a. undertegnede skal ta ansvar for å rette opp.

*Johannes H. Berg*

## NETTNYTT:

Det er ikke sikkert at det kommer til å bli noen fast praksis, men i det minste i dette og det neste nummeret vil vi trykke opp igjen en artikkel fra Internet — Greg Costikyans "A Farewell to Hexes", med den karakteristiske undertittelen "SPI Died for Your Sins". Dette er et innlegg på 8 A4-sider, så det må bli i form av en todelt føljetong...

Det finnes så mye bra stoff ute på Nettet at vi er temmelig sikre på at det færreste når over alt sammen; Costikyan er en så kunnskapsrik person at vi syntes hans versjon av "SPI-saken" fortjente et norsk publikum...

# A Farewell to Hexes

## The Wargame

*Requiescat in Pacem*

Born 1958

Died 1996

### BACK TO ARTICLES

**HOME SOFTWARE GAMES BOOKS STORIES KIDS HUMOR OTHER**

*This article is written by Greg Costikyan. The opinions expressed are his alone, and no other person or organization should be deemed in any way responsible for their expression here.*

The scene: Saturday morning at Origins [19]77, the national simulations gaming convention, hosted that year at a college on Staten Island by SPI. Inside the dealer's room, game companies feverishly prepare for the onslaught. Outside, beyond the locked doors, visible through the glass wall of the room, are the gamers, hundreds of them, pressed against the glass. At ten, the doors open, and the hordes pour through, charging into the dealer's room. Most make a beeline for the SPI table, where they stand, six deep, demanding copies of the new wargame releases, overwhelming the dozen staffers who stand behind the table to fulfill orders.

The scene: GenCon 96, the largest adventure gaming convention, Saturday morning in the open gaming area. We browse around, moving from table to table, seeing what people are playing. D&D, of course; Magic; Vampire; GURPS. Perhaps a game of Civilization, or Rail Baron.

Oh, here's someone playing a wargame. What's he playing?

Why, an out-of-print SPI wargame. From the seventies.

The time has come to admit defeat, to say a farewell to hexes. One might as well inscribe the tombstone: The Wargame, Requiescat in Pacem. Born, 1958; died 1996.

Even a few years ago, there was some doubt. As late as 1984, for instance, some claimed that there hadn't really been a decline in wargame sales, merely a dramatic increase in those of roleplaying games; but the claim was fallacious, even then. And by the present date, the precipitous decline of wargaming is clear, to everyone in the field.

What happened? Why did it decline? And -- who's to blame?

When you talk to industry professionals about the decline in wargames, they tend to sigh resignedly, and say, "It was inevitable." It seems that way, because wargaming's decline has been inexorable and irreversible, despite many efforts to halt its slide. But I don't believe it for a minute.

Wargaming's heyday was the 70s, when America was in the throes of post-Vietnam malaise, when anyone with an interest in military affairs was thought to be a fascistic warmonger. In the 1980s, military affairs became respectable once more, with the Soviet Union's renewed aggressiveness and the American defense build-up -- yet wargame sales declined. In the late 80s, Tom Clancy and others established a whole new genre of fiction -- the technothriller, the modern war story, which appeals to precisely the

same set of interests and emotions as the wargame. Far from seeing the decline of wargaming, the 1980s should have been its golden age.

Why didn't it happen? What went wrong?

One theory is that wargames just got too complex. The earliest Avalon Hill and SPI games were simple; a gaming novice picking up STALINGRAD in 1964 could have taught himself to play it, perhaps with a little difficulty, since even that was far more complex than mass-market offerings like MONOPOLY. But a novice picking up WAR IN EUROPE in 1980, or ADVANCED SQUAD LEADER in 1985 would be completely at a loss. SQUAD LEADER is perhaps the ideal illustration of the trend; the original John Hill game was simple enough to be accessible, and sold in excess of 200,000 copies, making it the best-selling wargame of all time. Over time, Avalon Hill published expansion upon expansion, turning it into a game of rococo complexity, culminating with the release of ADVANCED SQUAD LEADER, a game so complex than one could teach college-level courses in its play, so convoluted that its developer, Don Greenwood, felt compelled to include such minutiae as the Kindling Availability Table and the Sewer Emergence Chart. It is hard to believe that even the most macho of 'I-know-the-rules-so-I'm-better-than-you-you-poor-pathetic twit' complexity enthusiasts play this thing much.

This is all very nice, but it is important to realize that most wargames were always sold to wargame hobbyists; WAR IN EUROPE may have been too complex for Joe Maninthestreet, but good old Joe doesn't spend much time hanging around The Compleat Strategist or the Game Gallery anyway. Joe might find a wargame at the local mall -- but it would probably be an older, and simple, Avalon Hill game. And throughout the period of wargaming's popularity, simple games were always available -- the SPI Quads, later the micro and capsule games. While wargame marketers might have made more of an effort to reach out to new customers, the 'hypercomplexity' theory alone can't explain the industry's decline.

Another theory is 'computer games killed wargames.' And again, there is an argument here. SPI's feedback showed that 90+% of all wargames were played solitaire. Board games are not particularly well suited to solitaire play; computer games are solitaire by their very nature. Computer wargames have, with few exceptions, been derivative and intellectually void; still, their attractions for the avid gamer are obvious. It seems likely that many board wargamers have drifted off to computer games, and that many younger players who might otherwise have been attracted to wargaming have gone to computer games instead.

But again, this argument does not explain the whole. Few computer wargames match paper games for sophistication, depth, and accuracy. And computer wargaming is a miniscule part of the computer games industry; in that field, the conventional wisdom holds that computer wargames sell to a small, niche market. And finally, military conflict is by its nature a clash between two opposing strategists, something that solitaire computer games, with their clumsy artificial-intelligence opponents, simulate rather poorly. Computer roleplaying games have not killed D&D; computer adventure games have not killed novels; and computer wargames did not kill paper wargames.

What, then did? Where's the smoking gun?

Perhaps we need a little history.

The first wargame was TACTICS, designed and published in 1953 by Charles Roberts. It sold a mere 2000 copies, but emboldened Roberts to start the Avalon Hill Game Company in 1958. Avalon-Hill published TACTICS II and GETTYSBURG in that year.

In its first four years of existence, Avalon Hill published eighteen games, half of them "general interest"

adult games, the other half wargames. The wargames began to attract a following, a group of gamers who looked avidly forward to the next such product.

In 1962, Avalon Hill stumbled, failing to adapt to rapid changes in its system of distribution, and was taken over by Monarch Services, Avalon Hill's printer and one of its two largest creditors. Eric Dott, Monarch's president, became head of Avalon Hill, which he remained until recent years, when his son, Jack Dott, assumed the position. (In industry circles, they are known -- not to their faces -- as 'Papa Dott' and 'Baby Dott'.)

In 1964, Avalon Hill began *THE GENERAL*, the field's first magazine. It was, and has remained, a house organ, publishing variants and supplements for use with Avalon Hill's games, along with articles about developments at Avalon Hill and works in progress. To this writer's mind, it has always been excruciatingly dull, but in the mid-60s, it was instrumental in bringing together a self-conscious community of wargamers. They read *THE GENERAL* avidly, devouring news of games under development, and contacted each other through the classified ads the magazine offered as a free service to its subscribers. Just as the letter columns of the science fiction pulps were instrumental in forming science fiction fandom, so the classified ads in *THE GENERAL* were critical in the creation of the wargaming hobby.

In the mid-60s, indeed, well into the 70s, Avalon Hill had no full-time design staff. Tom Shaw, who had been hired by Charles Roberts, remained on staff, doing some design work and developing the games of others, but his main job was managing the company. Avalon Hill used a number of outside designers, and in 1966 they turned to Jim Dunnigan. Dunnigan published a military history fanzine (he would call it a series of monographs) called *KAMPF*, and had written a detailed critique of Avalon Hill's *BULGE* game. On the strength of this, Avalon Hill asked him to design his first game, *JUTLAND*. This was quickly followed by *1914*, and later a number of other games, including *PANZERBLITZ*, for many years Avalon Hill's best-seller.

In the 60s, wargaming clubs sprang up and fanzines began to appear, like John Boardman's *GRAUSTARK*, still being published, which founded the postal *DIPLOMACY* hobby. One of the best fanzines, *STRATEGY & TACTICS*, was begun by Chris Wagner, then a staff sergeant with the U.S. Air Force in Japan, in 1966. *S&T* was started with the serious intention of providing competition to *THE GENERAL*. Initially typeset and printed in Japan, it moved back to the States with Wager, but failed to achieve its circulation goals. Still, it attracted considerable interest among wargamers, who were happy to have an alternative voice to the corporate one of *THE GENERAL*. Too, *S&T* covered miniatures and games from other publishers, something *THE GENERAL* did not. (And never has; reading *THE GENERAL*, you would still never know that other companies exist.) In 1967, a graphic artist, Redmond Simonsen, agreed to do the design and layout for the magazine, and its appearance rapidly improved.

By late 1969, *S&T* was in financial trouble. Chris Wagner cast about for someone to take over the magazine, and eventually made an agreement with Jim Dunnigan, who founded Poultron Press, later renamed Simulations Publications, Inc., or SPI, to publish it. Simonsen continued on as *S&T*'s (and SPI's) art director.

Under Dunnigan, *S&T* made a rapid and complete change in direction. Dunnigan was convinced there was a large, pent-up demand for wargames. Avalon Hill had a conscious policy of publishing only one or two a year; they feared that publishing more would be self-defeating, as games would compete with each other. More, Avalon Hill always viewed itself as a publisher of adult games, with wargames only a part of its line.

For Dunnigan, the interest in wargames was an intellectual one, an extension of his interest in military history. He was convinced wargamers would appreciate detailed historical articles on the subjects of their games, and games that paid more than lip-service to the notion of historical accuracy.

Starting with issue 20, S&T began to publish a game in each issue, a startling concept for the time. This made perfect sense for everyone involved. Gamers got six games a year, at a considerably lower per-game cost than six games bought independently -- and a magazine to boot. SPI sold games directly to its customers, cutting out the middleman; and since the magazine's circulation was substantial, each magazine game was guaranteed substantial 'sales,' indeed, sales larger than SPI could expect for games sold separately. Moreover, SPI got an enormously valuable promotional vehicle: a magazine going to its core customers, in which it could promote its non-magazine games.

It is hard to overemphasize the importance of S&T to the history of wargaming; indeed, the rise and fall of the hobby can virtually be correlated with the rise and fall of S&T. SPI's staff freely discussed future plans, down to details of marketing and distribution, in the pages of the magazine; its subscribers began to feel a personal stake in the company's survival, going so far as to write long letters of advice and volunteering time and effort to help the company survive. The historical articles were of the highest quality, and quite unlike anything being published in the historical magazines of the period, since SPI, befitting its gaming orientation, tried to quantify almost everything, providing copious tables of comparative data on, for instance, the merits of World War II-era tanks. Other journals tended to be far more descriptive. As a result, S&T acquired a readership even among military history devotees who had no interest in the games.

Perhaps S&T's most important innovation, however, was its feedback system. Using primitive Burroughs, later IBM, minicomputers, Dunnigan put together a highly sophisticated system to obtain marketing information from his customers. In every issue of the magazine, there was a response card, with 96 numbered blanks. At the back of the magazine were a series of questions, to which a reader could respond by entering a number between 0 and 9 on the blanks of the card. Some questions provided marketing data, e.g., average age of the readership; some were used to provide competitive rankings of SPI's and other publishers' products, charts that S&T's readers pored over when deciding what game to buy next. And some were used to ask the readers what kinds of games they'd like to see. Indeed, every issue provided brief write-ups of game ideas, and SPI would design the games which received the highest ratings.

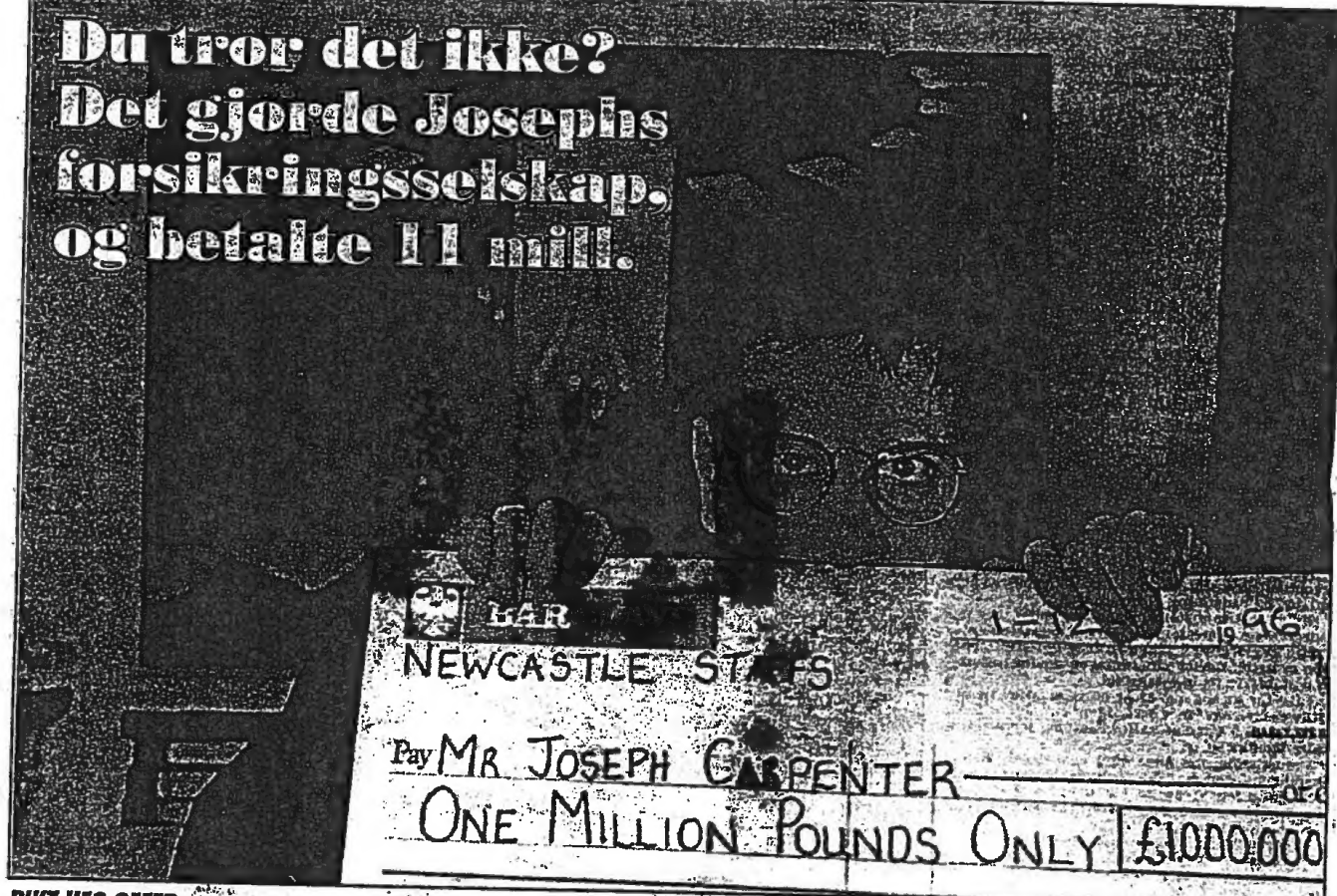
This kind of market research was astonishing for the field, remains astonishing for the field, would be astonishing in *any* field. SPI had immediate, timely data telling it *precisely* what its most valued customers thought. For years, the sales of SPI's games correlated very closely with the feedback results; SPI could predict, with virtual certainty, a game's sales before embarking on its design. How could the company lose?

[The real question, of course, is: why hasn't this been imitated? In the early 70s, SPI had to hire keypunchers to sit there by the hour, entering this data, then crunch the numbers hour by hour using expensive computers and expensive custom software. Today, reproducing SPI's feedback capabilities would be trivial, using OCR technology, flatfile database software, and cheap PC clones. And yet every company in the field continues to publish by guess and by God. Think what TSR alone could do with THE DRAGON....]



# - TATT AV UFO

**Du tror det ikke?  
Det gjorde Josephs  
forsikringselskap,  
og betalte 11 mill.**



**RIKT UFO-OFFER:** Joseph Carpenter viser frem sjekken som er beviset på at han har heve sin forsikring mot UFO-bortføringer på nesten 11 millioner kroner. Foto: BULL

Av EGIL SVENDSEY og  
MAGDALENA KVARNING  
OSLO/LONDON.  
(VG/AFTONBLA-  
DET) Dette er histo-  
rien som går «X-  
Files» en høy gang:  
Joseph Carpenter  
(23) har fått nesten  
11 millioner kroner i

erstatning fordi han  
ble kidnappet av en  
UFO!

Jo da, du leste riktig, og selv om  
du ikke tror det før du har lest  
det, er historien - i alle fall pen-  
gentbetalingen - sann.

Det er det britiske forsik-  
ringsselskapet Grip som står  
bak den himmelaks utbetalin-  
gen.

I august tilbød nemlig selska-  
pet folk å tegne forsikringer

mot å bli voldtatt, oppspist eller  
kidnappet av utenomjordiske  
vesener.

Og UFO-fantast Joseph Car-  
penter slo til og tegnet forsik-  
ring. Nå har han fått meget  
godt betalt for det!

## UFO-spaning

Ifølge selskapets leder, Simon  
Burgess, sitter Carpenter med  
så sikre bevis på at han har  
vært bortført at selskapet må-

te utbetale forsikringssummen.

Joseph Carpenters økonomis-  
ke eventyr begynte da han sam-  
men med en gruppe venner var  
på UFO-spaning i Wiltshire.  
Der fikk gruppen følge den se-  
riøse britiske avisen Evening  
Standard øye på en triangulær  
farkost.

Og Carpenter, som var forsik-  
ret, nærmet seg farkosten mens  
de andre hadde kamera med og  
filmet det de hevder var en  
UFO.

- Et intenst lys skinte på meg  
og jeg ble løftet fra jorden og  
besvimte, sier Carpenter til  
Evening Standard.

- Da jeg våknet var jeg på et  
uvirkelig sted, i et slags grønt  
drivhus. Jeg fikk et skarpt oran-  
sje lys i ansiktet, og da jeg an-  
de meg fikk jeg se et utenom-  
jordisk vesen, med trekantet  
hode, to smale nesebor og ol-  
vengreun delfinlignende hud.  
Jeg ble livredd, men den sa til  
meg telepatiske: «Vær ikke redd.  
Vi vil deg ikke noe vondt.» Jeg  
besvimte igjen og da jeg våknet  
var jeg på jorden igjen.

Som «minne» fra kidnappin-  
gen har Carpenter foruten fil-  
men som vennene hans så he-  
lellig tok, også en klønnende  
gjenstand som forsikrings-  
selskapet hevder skal ha tilhørt en  
av de utenomjordiske.

Filmene har forsikringssel-  
skapet sikret seg - som bevis.

Nå skal de forhandle med  
amerikanske medieselskaper  
om rettighetene til materialet.

Og prisen? Det sier historien  
forelsplig låtet om. Men det  
skulle ikke forundre oss om for-  
sikringselskapet forlanger  
mer enn de ti millionene de har  
betalt Carpenter.

Vi vil få gi en takk til VG, som har muntret  
opp hverdagen til mange av oss med vedstående  
historie. Ville du trodd dette, om det hadde  
hendt i et rollespill?

# ARES' spillprogram våren 1997

*Programmet i høstsemesteret ble bare delvis gjennomført, hovedsaklig på grunn av elendig oppslutning om en rekke av møtene. Dette betyr nok igjen at vi har en god del å ta fatt i på PR-sektoren: Det hjelper ikke om man har verdens flotteste arrangementer, hvis ikke noen får høre om dem. Hjelp oss gjerne med dette ved å fortelle andre spillinteresserte om hva vi driver med, invitere dem med til turneringer, etc. Styret har foreløpig satt opp et program som angitt under. Her kan det nok komme til noen flere ting eller bli noen endringer, men utgangspunktet er gitt for første kvartal '97, og vel så det:*

- 22/1: *Vampire-turnering*
  - 5/2: *World in Flames Final Edition-presentasjon*
  - 19/2: *Star Wars-turnering*
  - 5/3: *Magic-turnering*
  - 19/3: *The Babylon Project-demo*
  - 9/4: *Objective: Norway-demo*
- (motto: 57-årsdager er til for å feires!)

Normalt vil de fleste turneringer, demonstrasjoner etc. begynne kl. 1800 (med forbehold for feil og forsinkelser).